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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: MUTHANNA TRIBAL LEADER SEEKS U.S. SUPPORT FOR NEW
PARTY

REF: BAGHDAD 1355

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Muthanna reporting cable.

¶2. (S/REL MCFI) Summary: Abu Chefat, a powerful, well-connected sheikh of the influential Albu Hassan tribe, is concerned that Iran is poised to benefit from the upcoming provincial elections. He is exploring the possibility of founding a new secular political party, and would like U.S. "moral support" for the effort. End Summary.

RELIGIOUS PARTIES THE TOOL OF TEHRAN

¶3. (S/REL MCFI) Abu Chefat is a powerful sheikh in the influential Albu Hassan tribe, which has links to tribal confederations stretching from Anbar to Saudi Arabia. Widely respected for his independence and frankness, in a private April 30 meeting with Team Leader, Abu Chefat expressed his concern that, if left unchallenged, Iran was poised to benefit from the upcoming provincial elections. He pointed to Tehran's infiltration of the religious parties, sponsored assassinations (e.g., the killing of former Governor al-Hassani in August 2007), and efforts to cultivate sheikhs through sponsored trips to Iran, saying "These are wolves in religious clothing." The outcome, he believed, would be an Iranian controlled buffer state in southern Iraq, "just like Hizbollah in Lebanon."

A NEW SECULAR PARTY IS THE ANSWER

¶4. (S/REL MCFI) Abu Chefat said that in casting about for a solution he and other leading figures were considering founding a new political party. "We want a secular, national, democratic party that stands against extremism and chaos," he said. Abu Chefat stated he already sounded out many potential supporters, and had discussed with a leading judge about how to register the party by the end of May so that it could compete in the October elections. "There are many people who would rally to us: tribal sheikhs, community leaders, academics, doctors, lawyers, engineers, security officials, and even clerics," he claimed, predicting victories in Muthanna, Diwaniya, and Najaf provinces. Noting his tribal links to the Sunni tribes of Anbar, Abu Chefat said the movement had the potential to become a national party bridging sectarian divides.

REQUEST FOR U.S. "MORAL SUPPORT"

¶5. (S/REL MCFI) Abu Chefat acknowledged that his initiative faced many potential obstacles. "There'll be some tough political battles ahead." He asked if the United States would be able to lend its "moral support." "It's not money -- we have money -- but sponsorship; people need to know you

are behind us," Abu Chefat said, adding, "There are many people who would join us, but they're afraid, they need cover." He also stressed the importance of voter education to help citizens better understand the issues. Summarizing his hope for U.S. support, Abu Chefat said "We have an opportunity for change, but I don't want to be a victim."

¶6. (S/REL MCFI) Comment: Abu Chefat's overture follows separate previous meetings with Governor Marzook and other tribal and community leaders who have expressed strong concern about how Iran may try to shape provincial elections in order to dominate southern Iraq (reftel). It is likely that Marzook and Abu Chefat are in contact, since Marzook as an independent would find a welcome niche in the proposed new secular party. End Comment.
CROCKER